

Second career on the river 🇪🇺

‘Over the moon’: How a female captain saved the Moselle ferry

Skipper Andrea Greif steers the Moselle ferry through difficult times and her courage is paying off



For a few weeks now, Andrea Greif has officially been working as the first female ferry operator between Wasserbillig and Oberbillig © Photo credit: Marc Wilwert



Irina Figut
Reporter

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Andrea Greif beams with joy: she’s done it. Behind her lie strenuous months of learning and preparation. After a year and a half of training, the 55-year-old recently passed her exam as a skipper and is now the new captain of the Moselle ferry “Sankta Maria II” that takes passengers from the Luxembourg side of the river in Wasserbillig to the German side in Oberbillig.

“I am over the moon! Steering the ferry is getting better every day,” she said, sitting confidently at the helm. The solar ferry travels daily between the Luxembourg and German banks of the Moselle – it is particularly busy in the mornings and evenings. On this Wednesday morning, Greif is focused on the route between the two stations and navigating safely across the river.

Employment is a stroke of luck

“I was so looking forward to this job. I'm really proud to have gotten it,” she said with a smile. She previously worked for many years in the garden centre of a local municipality in the neighbourhood. The job was too physically demanding, she said, but deciding to hand in her notice was still not easy. Her former boss was understanding though. “He knew that I would leave if I got this job,” Greif said.

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Andrea Greif is “extremely satisfied” with her job: She particularly enjoys steering the ferry and liaising with customers © Photo credit: Marc Wilwert

Greif is the first woman to work as a skipper on the “Sankta Maria II” – the team was previously all male. For the operating communities of Oberbillig and Merttert, her employment is a stroke of luck. Ferry skippers are rare, and it is almost impossible to find trained skippers who also have an inland navigation licence, said Oberbillig’s mayor Andreas Beiling.

“People are so grateful. I’ve truly found my place here.”

Andrea Greif

New Moselle ferry captain

Search for more candidates is underway

One solution would be to train new recruits – but this is also associated with hurdles, as Greif now knows from her own experience. “The biggest challenge for me during my training was getting admission to the exam, because there are strict requirements,” she said.

She currently works alternating shifts with another ferryman. Together, they keep the ferry running seven days a week – even on public holidays. A third skipper has been absent for some time due to illness, leaving the pair with a tougher workload. They are supported by seven cashiers and two temporary staff. “We are looking for more candidates to drive the ferry,” said the woman.



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Marie-Jeanne lives on the German side and regularly commutes by ferry to various appointments in Luxembourg © Photo credit: Marc Wilwert



Thanks to their reinforcement, the Mosel ferry now runs until 19:00 on weekdays and on weekends – longer than before. Nevertheless, many passengers are in favour of longer journey times. “It would be nice if the ferry ran until 8 o’clock in the evening during the week again, like it used to,” said Marie-Jeanne, 63.

She moved to the German side of the Moselle ten years ago and has been commuting to Luxembourg regularly ever since – to the doctor, the shops or for other appointments. Uwe from Wasserbillig agreed: “The third ferry driver has made things better, but there’s still room for improvement.” The 65-year-old often uses the ferry to visit his mother in Trier.

How the “Sankta-Maria II” travels

The Moselle ferry “Sankta-Maria II” now operates longer hours. From Monday to Friday, it runs from 6:30 to 13.30 and from 16:00 to 19:00. On weekends and public holidays, it operates continuously from 11:00 to 18:00.

Homemade fish or a scrambled egg as a gift

Andrea Greif is not fazed by the tense staffing situation. “Then my remaining ten years until I retire are safe here,” she said with a laugh. She has not experienced any particular difficulties so far: “As a mother of three, what could possibly shake me?” she said confidently.



Christian (l.) from Heilbronn (Germany) and Philipp from Kaiserslautern are travelling to the North Sea in the Netherlands as tourists. "The ferry has a decelerating effect," they say © Photo credit: Marc Wilwert

She is particularly touched by the appreciation shown by the passengers: "People are so grateful. I've truly found my place here." Sometimes they bring her and her other work colleagues small gifts - homemade fish or a roll with scrambled eggs have been among them. Smaller gifts also sweeten the day: a box of chocolates with a thank-you note or a bottle of herbal liqueur.

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